

Philosophical Taoism: A Christian Appraisal

The Chinese translation of John 1:1 reads, "In the beginning was the Tao..." Are Taoism and Christianity compatible? Dr. Michael Gleghorn says that even though there are some similarities, Christianity's uniqueness remains separate from all philosophies, including Taoism.



This article is also available in [Spanish](#).

Taoism and the Tao

The philosophy of Taoism is traditionally held to have originated in China with a man named Lao-tzu. Although most scholars doubt that he was an actual historical figure, tradition dates his life from 604-517 B.C. The story goes that Lao-tzu, "saddened by his people's disinclination to cultivate the natural goodness he advocated,"^{1} decided to head west and abandon civilization. As he was leaving, the gatekeeper asked if he would write down his teachings for the benefit of society. Lao-tzu consented, retired for a few days, and returned with a brief work called *Tao-Te Ching*, "The Classic of the Way and Its Power."^{2} It "contains 81 short chapters describing the meaning of Tao and how one should live according to the Tao."^{3} The term *Tao* is typically translated into English as "way", but it can also be translated as "path," "road" or "course."

The chief object of philosophical Taoism "is to live in a way that conserves life's vitality by not expending it in useless, draining ways, the chief of which are friction and conflict."^{4} One does this by living in harmony with the Tao, or Way, of all things: the way of nature, of society, and of oneself. Taoist philosophers have a particular concept that characterizes action in harmony with the Tao. They call it *wu-*

wei. Literally this means “non-action,” but practically speaking it means taking no action that is contrary to nature. Thus, “action in the mode of *wu-wei* is action in which friction – in interpersonal relationships, in intra-psychic conflict, and in relation to nature – is reduced to the minimum.”[\[5\]](#)

But if we are to live in harmony with the Tao, we must first get some idea of what it is. And this presents something of a difficulty, for *Tao-Te Ching* begins by asserting that words are not adequate for explaining the Tao: “The Tao . . . that can be told of is not the eternal Tao.”[\[6\]](#) But if words cannot fully explain the Tao, they can at least suggest it. In chapter 25 we read:

There was something undifferentiated and yet complete,
Which existed before heaven and earth.
Soundless and formless, it depends on nothing and does not
change. It operates everywhere and is free from danger.
It may be considered the mother of the universe.
I do not know its name; I call it Tao.[\[7\]](#)

This passage says a lot about the Tao. For instance, it is prior to the physical universe.[\[8\]](#) It is independent and does not change. It operates everywhere. And it apparently gave birth to the universe. If this is so, you may be thinking that the Tao sounds awfully similar to the Christian God. However, some of these similarities are more apparent than real – and there are also major differences.

God and the Tao

In philosophical Taoism, “Tao” is the term used to signify ultimate reality. “Tao is that reality . . . that existed prior to and gave rise to all other things, including Heaven and Earth and everything upon or within them.”[\[9\]](#) For this reason one might initially think that what a Taoist means by the Tao is virtually synonymous with what the Christian means

by God. But is this really so?

After Lao-tzu, the most important representative of philosophical Taoism was a man named Chuang-tzu, believed to have lived sometime between 399-295 B.C. He is the author of a text called the *Chuang Tzu*. While the thought of these two men is certainly different, there are also important similarities. One of these concerns the relationship of the Tao to the physical universe. In words reminiscent of *Tao-Te Ching*, the *Chuang Tzu* declares, "Before heaven and earth came into being, Tao existed by itself from all time. . . . It created heaven and earth."[{10}](#)

The most interesting part of this statement is the assertion that the Tao created heaven and earth. How are we to understand this? Does Chuang-tzu view the Tao as Creator in the same sense in which Christians would apply this term to God? Probably not. In addressing such questions one commentator has written: "Any personal God . . . is clearly out of harmony with Chuang Tzu's philosophy."[{11}](#) Properly speaking, Taoists view the Tao more as a *principle* than a *person*. Indeed, some scholars speak of the Tao as "an impersonal force of existence that is beyond differentiation."[{12}](#) So how does the concept of the Tao compare with the Christian view of God in the Bible?

Both the Tao and God are similarly credited with creating heaven and earth. This similarity may offer an initial point of contact between Christians and Taoists, a way to begin a meaningful dialogue about the nature of ultimate reality. As Christians we should always acknowledge any common ground that we might share with those from other religious perspectives. In Acts 17 Paul does this very thing when he speaks at the Areopagus in Athens. In verse 28 he quotes with approval from two pagan poets to help illustrate something of the nature of God.

But Paul also made distinctions between the Christian doctrine

of God and the views of the Athenians. In the same way, we also need to notice how the Tao differs from a biblical view of God. The greatest difference is that the Tao is impersonal whereas God is personal. The Tao is like a force, principle or energy; the Christian God is a personal being. It's crucial to realize that ultimate reality cannot be both personal and impersonal at the same time and in the same sense. Let's look at the reasons to believe that ultimate reality is personal.

Morality and the Tao

Philosophical Taoism teaches that the Tao, or ultimate reality, is impersonal. If this is so, then what becomes of morality? Can an impersonal force be the source of objective moral values that apply to all men, at all times, in all places? Is an impersonal force capable of distinguishing between good and evil? Or can such distinctions only be made by personal beings? And what of that haunting sense of obligation we all feel to do what is good and avoid what is evil? Can we be morally obligated to obey an impersonal force? Or does our nagging sense of moral obligation seem to presuppose a Moral Lawgiver to whom we are morally accountable?

Such questions are important because each of us, if we're honest, recognizes that there is an objective distinction between moral good and evil. Such distinctions are not ultimately dependent on our preferences or feelings; they are essential to the very nature of reality. But the Tao is neither capable of making such distinctions, nor of serving as the source of such objective moral values. Only a personal agent can fill such roles. "The ultimate form of the *Tao* is beyond moral distinctions."[\[13\]](#)

The doctrine of moral relativism is explicitly taught in the writings of Chuang-tzu. He writes, "In their own way things are all right . . . generosity, strangeness, deceit, and abnormality. The Tao identifies them all as one."[\[14\]](#) This

statement helps clarify why the notion of a personal God is inconsistent with Taoist philosophy. Persons make moral distinctions between right and wrong, good and evil. But according to Chuang-tzu, the impersonal Tao identifies them all as one.

This has serious implications for philosophical Taoists. If the goal of the Taoist sage is to live in harmony with the Tao, then shouldn't moral distinctions be abandoned? If the Tao makes no such distinctions, why should its followers do so? Indeed, Chuang-tzu belittles those who embrace such distinctions declaring that they "must be either stupid or wrong."[\[15\]](#)

Biblical Christianity, however, teaches that there are such things as objective moral values. The source of such values is the eternal, transcendent, holy God of the Bible. Unlike the Tao, the Christian God is not beyond moral distinctions. On the contrary, John tells us, "God is light; in him there is no darkness at all." (1 John 1:5) And Moses describes Him as "A God of faithfulness and without injustice." (Deut. 32:4) And while Taoism proclaims an *impersonal* principle which judges no one, the Apostle Paul describes a *personal* God to whom we are morally accountable and who will one day judge the world in righteousness (Acts 17:31; Rom. 1:18-2:6). In summary, a personal Moral Lawgiver provides a better explanation of objective moral values than does an impersonal principle.

Persons and the Tao

We've seen that philosophical Taoism and biblical Christianity differ on the nature of ultimate reality. Taoists view ultimate reality (i.e. the Tao) as an impersonal force that brought the universe into being. Christians view ultimate reality (i.e. God) as the personal Creator of the universe. The law of non-contradiction says it's impossible for ultimate reality to be both personal and impersonal at the same time and in the same sense. Thus, if one of these views is true,

the other certainly must be false.

I argued that if objective moral values are real (and we all live as if they are), then it is more reasonable to believe that the source of such values is personal, rather than impersonal. Now I want to continue this line of thought by arguing that the existence of human persons is best explained by appealing to a personal Creator rather than to an impersonal principle like the Tao. To help us see why this is so, let's briefly consider some of the differences between a personal being and an impersonal principle.

First, personal beings (like men and women) possess such attributes as intellect, emotion, and will. That is, they have the ability to think, feel, and take considered action. An impersonal principle can do none of these things. In addition, a personal being has the ability to form and maintain relationships with other persons. But again, this is something that an impersonal force simply cannot do. If a cause must always be greater than the effect it produces, then does it make more sense to believe that the ultimate cause of human persons is personal or impersonal?

The Bible says that men and women are created in the image of God. (Gen. 1:26-27) God is described as possessing all the attributes of a personal being. He thinks, knows and understands. (Ps.139) He experiences emotions such as sorrow (Gen. 6:6) and joy. (Matt. 25:21; Jn. 15:11) He is described as working "all things after the counsel of His will." (Eph. 1:11) Finally, He is able to form and maintain relationships with other persons. (Jer. 1:5; Gal. 1:15) Indeed, this was true even before God created anything, for from all eternity the three distinct persons of the Godhead – the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit – have enjoyed intimate communion and fellowship with one another. (Jn. 14-17)

It's crucial to realize that the impersonal Tao possesses none of these personal attributes. But if that which is personal is

superior to that which is impersonal, then it seems more reasonable to believe that the ultimate cause of human persons must likewise be personal. And thus the personal God of the Bible provides a better explanation for the existence of human persons than does the impersonal Tao.

Evangelism and the Tao

I've emphasized that one of the crucial differences between philosophical Taoism and biblical Christianity is the nature of ultimate reality. Taoists hold that the Tao is impersonal; Christians hold that God is personal. I've argued that it is more reasonable to believe that both objective moral values and human persons come from a source that is ultimately personal rather than impersonal. I wish to conclude by providing one more line of evidence for this position.[{16}](#)

At the end of chapter 67 of the *Tao Te Ching* we read this statement: "When Heaven is to save a person, Heaven will protect him through deep love."[{17}](#) What does such a statement mean? Although it may be argued that it was simply intended as a figure of speech, it's interesting that the author should apparently feel led to ascribe personal attributes to what is supposed to be an impersonal Heaven.

For instance the phrase, "When Heaven is to save a person," seems to imply a considered action on Heaven's part. But only persons can take considered action; an impersonal force cannot do so. In addition, the second half of the sentence speaks of Heaven's protecting a person through "deep love." But an impersonal force is incapable of love. Such love seems once again to require a personal agent.

Another interesting statement from the *Tao Te Ching* occurs at the end of chapter 62:

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Why did the ancients so treasure this DAO? Is it not because

it has been said of it: "Whosoever asks will receive; whosoever has sinned will be forgiven"? Therefore is DAO the most exquisite thing on earth.{18}

This passage also ascribes personal attributes to the impersonal Tao. Specifically, the Tao is said to forgive sinners. This raises two difficulties. First, "forgiveness" means that a moral standard has been broken. But the *Tao* is beyond such moral distinctions!"{19} Second, only persons can exercise forgiveness. An impersonal force is incapable of such a thing.

Such statements may open the door for Christians to tell their Taoist friends about the deep love and forgiveness of God revealed in the Bible. Jesus spoke of God's deep love when He said, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16) And the Apostle John spoke of God's continued willingness to forgive His children when he wrote, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9) Since only persons are capable of love and forgiveness, it seems more reasonable to believe that the personal God of the Bible, rather than the impersonal Tao of Taoism, is the ultimate source of such precious gifts.

Notes

1. Huston Smith, *The World's Religions* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1991), 197.
2. Ibid.
3. Kenneth Boa, *Cults, World Religions and the Occult* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1990), 57.
4. Smith, 200.
5. Ibid.
6. *Tao-Te Ching*, trans. Wing-Tsit Chan, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1963), 139.
7. Ibid., 152.

8. However, in chap. 7 of Chan's translation we read, "Heaven is eternal and earth everlasting." There are some apparent inconsistencies in Tao Te Ching.
9. Robert Henricks, *Confucius, the Tao, the Ancestors, and the Buddha: The Religions of China*, in *Great World Religions: Beliefs, Practices and Histories, Part IV* (n.p.: The Teaching Company Limited Partnership, 1998), 14.
10. Chuang Tzu, trans. Wing-Tsit Chan, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, 194.
11. Ibid., 181.
12. Dean C. Halverson and Kent Kedl, "Taoism," in *The Compact Guide to World Religions*, ed. Dean C. Halverson (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 1996), 224.
13. Ibid.
14. Chuang Tzu, trans. Wing-Tsit Chan, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, 184.
15. Ibid., 206.
16. In this section I have relied heavily on the observations and insights of Halverson and Kedl in *The Compact Guide to World Religions*, 227-230.
17. Tao-Te Ching, trans. Wing-Tsit Chan, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, 171.
18. Richard Wilhelm (trans. into German). *Tao Te Ching*. H.G. Oswald (trans. into English) (New York: Penguin Books, 1990), 55, cited in Halverson, ed., *The Compact Guide to World Religions*, 229.
19. Halverson, ed., *The Compact Guide to World Religions*, 229.

Putting the Brakes on Human Genetic Engineering

Dr. Michael Gleghorn argues that a biblical view of man should both inform and limit how reproductive technology and genetic engineering are applied to humanity.

Are We Speeding toward a Brave New World?

With ongoing advances in reproductive technology and genetic engineering, man's ability to make himself what he pleases is increasingly within reach. For example, in a 1996 *Nature* editorial it was stated, "the growing power of molecular genetics confronts us with future prospects of being able to change the nature of our species."[\[1\]](#) This raises serious ethical concerns. The power to change human nature says nothing at all about whether we *ought* to change it. How might we use such unprecedented power?

Both Aldous Huxley and C. S. Lewis made disturbing predictions about man's possible future. Both explored what might happen if technologies like genetic engineering and psychological conditioning were unwisely applied to mankind.

In Huxley's *Brave New World* children are no longer born to mothers and fathers (words considered disgusting and taboo); rather, they are "grown" in government owned "hatcheries."[\[2\]](#) Human freedom is virtually non-existent because each person is genetically engineered and psychologically conditioned to fulfill a particular social role. Society is structured into five classes. On top are the Alphas, society's elite. They are the intellectuals, educators, and government officials. At bottom are the Epsilons. They handle society's most menial tasks. In the middle are the Betas, Gammas, and Deltas, each

having responsibilities appropriate to their class.

In *The Abolition of Man*, C. S. Lewis argues that man's final conquest of nature may be his conquest of *human* nature. Lewis calls those who develop and gain such power *conditioners*. They can make humanity whatever they please. But what will it "please" them to make?

Neither Huxley nor Lewis seem optimistic. Consider, for instance, what could happen if the man-makers of the future abandon belief in objective moral values—the doctrine that some things are really right and others really wrong. Would they make humanity "better"? The idea of "better" implies a standard of comparison that is either absolute or relative. But these man-makers reject an *absolute* standard of right and wrong. For such moral relativists then, a claim that honesty is good and lying is evil means nearly the same as a claim that hot chocolate is good but coffee is disgusting! Claims about good and evil are merely matters of *personal* taste or preference, nothing more.

But what if there really are objective moral values? If so, such human conditioners could only make us better by accident, for they have rejected the very standard by which *genuine improvement* could ever be measured! And apart from this objective moral standard, "better" means *only* what they themselves happen to like.

In contrast to such moral relativism, the Bible teaches that objective moral values are real. It points to the moral perfection of God as the absolute standard against which all human moral actions should be measured. Therefore, if we let a biblical view of man and morality inform how we choose to apply genetic engineering, we may be able to embrace the benefits and avoid the pitfalls of this powerful new technology.

This Present Darkness

Aldous Huxley and C. S. Lewis feared that if we misapply technologies like genetic engineering to ourselves we might soon become an endangered species! I share their concerns. Although I am *not* opposed to research and development in this area, I do think it should be constrained by a biblical view of man. Unfortunately, many researchers regard this view as little more than an antiquated myth. The biblical view of man has been rejected, or worse, entirely ignored. That such researchers should feel little incentive for placing biblical constraints on their work is therefore hardly surprising.

A good example of this mindset can be found in Lee Silver's 1997 book, *Remaking Eden: Cloning and Beyond in a Brave New World*. He endorses Huxley's prediction about the power man will gain over reproduction.[\[3\]](#) But while Huxley and Lewis thought the state would use such power to promote its own agenda, Silver believes parents will use it to enhance the lives of their children. He thinks it's inconsistent to allow parents to provide their children with the best home environment, the best health care, the best educational opportunities and cultural experiences, but *not* the best genes.[\[4\]](#) He predicts that if the technology to change or enhance genes becomes available, no one will be able to stop parents from using it.[\[5\]](#) Since the amount of money to be made by such services would be staggering, "the global marketplace will reign supreme."[\[6\]](#)

So how close is the day when parents might request a genetic upgrade for their children? Well, judge for yourself. The successful development of in vitro fertilization in 1978 not only allowed scientists to cure a certain type of infertility, it also gave them access to the embryo. In principle, this makes it possible "to observe and modify . . . its genetic material before a pregnancy is initiated."[\[7\]](#) Although such genetic modification has not yet taken place, it is now

“possible to screen thousands of different genes within individual embryos” to see how such potential children might differ from one another.{8}

Still, genetic *screening* is not genetic *engineering*. No genes are added or changed.{9} It simply allows parents to choose from the selection of embryos generated by this procedure. But there is a problem: it’s currently legal to destroy the embryos that aren’t chosen!{10} And this constitutes a serious infringement upon the rights of the unborn. Furthermore, Silver predicts that “genetic engineering of human embryos” will become feasible by the middle of this century.{11}

While such remarks may sound alarming, we must remember that it’s not the technology itself, but its *misapplication* that’s the problem.

What Might the Future Hold?

One of the worst consequences of contemporary reproductive technology is the creation, and subsequent destruction, of numerous human embryos. Since 1997, genetic screening has made it “possible to screen thousands of different genes within individual embryos” to see how such potential children might differ from one another.{12} This information allows prospective parents to choose the one embryo among many which they believe will make the best child. Unfortunately, the remaining embryos are simply destroyed! If such technology is not constrained by a biblical view of man, this new form of legalized eugenics may be only the beginning. In light of such advancing technologies, what might the future hold?

The future envisioned by Lee Silver in *Remaking Eden* is both fascinating and disturbing. He speculates that by the year 2350 two very distinct classes of people may exist: the *Naturals* and the *Gene-Enriched* or *GenRich*. Naturals are people like you and me, born by natural methods and not genetically enriched. The GenRich, who may account for roughly ten percent

of the American population, are distinguished from Naturals in that they “all carry synthetic genes . . . that were created in the laboratory.”[\[13\]](#) Silver believes that over time the genetic distance between Naturals and the GenRich will become ever greater. Eventually all aspects of the government, economy, media, entertainment, and education will be controlled by the GenRich.[\[14\]](#) “In contrast, Naturals [will] work as low-paid service providers or as laborers,” and their children will only be taught the skills needed to do the jobs available to their class.[\[15\]](#)

If this social structure strikes you as loosely reminiscent of Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World* you’re not alone. In fact, Silver subtitled his book, *Cloning and Beyond in a Brave New World*. But while Silver believes wealthy parents will use genetic engineering to enhance the lives of their children, Huxley thought such power would be controlled by the state. And here’s where things get tricky.

Silver predicts that society will be “controlled by . . . the GenRich.”[\[16\]](#) They will be the sole governing class and the sole controllers of all sophisticated technology, including genetic engineering. But then what can prevent the GenRich from passing laws that permit engineering the Naturals to be a class of servants? Would not the more powerful, but less numerous, GenRich want to prevent the Naturals from entertaining revolutionary ideas? And might they not do this through genetic engineering and psychological conditioning? Have we not returned to something like Huxley’s *Brave New World*? How might we avoid such a future?

The biblical view of man provides an answer to this question.

The Biblical Doctrine of Man

In his book *Remaking Eden*, Lee Silver anticipates a future in which we can genetically alter human nature. He predicts that “genetic engineering of human embryos” will become feasible by

the middle of this century.{17} Suppose he is right about this. Does it follow that we *ought* to genetically engineer humans simply because we *can*? How we answer this question will largely depend on our view of man.

Exactly what are we, anyway? Are we merely matter which, through a long, undirected evolutionary process, has finally become self-conscious? Or are we something more? The Bible declares that both men and women were created in the image of God.{18} This doctrine forms the basis for the Christian belief in both the dignity of man and the sanctity of human life. Even after man's fall into sin the image of God, though marred, was not completely lost.{19}

Thus in Genesis 9:6 we read, "Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed, for in the image of God He made man." When God instituted capital punishment for murder, it was because He had created man in His image. But this verse not only affirms that man bears the image of God, it also implies that human life is sacred and imposes a severe penalty for the unjustified taking of such a life. It also suggests that man is subject to an absolute moral law which finds its source in God. You might say it indicates that all men "are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights," chief of which is the right to life!

The biblical doctrine of man needs to be brought into ethical discussions of reproductive technology and genetic engineering. Because man bears God's image, certain boundaries should not be crossed. For example, scientific evidence indicates that human life begins at conception. Therefore, destroying human embryos clearly violates their "unalienable" right to life. Furthermore, any attempt to genetically alter man's unique nature as a rational, emotional, volitional, moral agent *could* be viewed as an attack on the image of God in man.{20} We must be careful how we choose to apply such technologies—especially to ourselves!

Science within the Limits of Biblical Morality Alone

C. S. Lewis compared man's attempt to conquer human nature to "the magician's bargain: give up our soul, get power in return."[{21}](#) But once we take the final step of reducing humanity "to the level of mere Nature . . . the being who stood to gain and the being who has been sacrificed are one and the same."[{22}](#) Lewis referred to this final step as the abolition of man. By this he did not mean the abolition of man's physical being. Rather, he was concerned about potentially detrimental changes to that unique, *immaterial* component of human nature. Although I have doubts about whether we could *actually* change this aspect of human nature, I do object to any *attempt* by man to alter it through genetic engineering. Since God based capital punishment for murder on the fact that man was made in His image, it seems that any attempt to genetically alter human nature, fallen though it is, may likewise be morally offensive.[{23}](#)

Still, the solution is not to abandon scientific research. Rather, we must simply keep it within proper moral boundaries. To make this clear, let's consider an example of a morally acceptable application of genetic engineering which also offers great potential benefit to humanity. There has recently been some talk of possible new AIDS vaccines. One of these, a brainchild of Robert Gallo's institute, makes use of the salmonella bacteria responsible for typhoid. The bacteria are genetically altered to be less infectious and to carry portions of HIV DNA into human intestinal cells. Alex Dominguez writes, "The infected intestinal cells are . . . hijacked by the HIV and produce a part of the HIV virus, which is not harmful but causes an immune response. Researchers hope that will allow the body to fight off an attack by the real HIV virus."[{24}](#) Although at this time the vaccine is still being developed, it provides an example of how genetic engineering might be used in both a morally acceptable and

humanly beneficial way.

But why is this a “morally acceptable” example? Briefly, unlike the scenarios imagined by Aldous Huxley and C. S. Lewis, man’s unique identity as a rational moral agent made in the image of God is not in any way changed or compromised. Using genetically altered bacteria as a potential vaccine against HIV does not seek to alter human nature any more than a vaccine against rabies does.

Confining scientific research within the limits of an objective, biblical morality thus precludes neither scientific advancement nor human benefit. Rather, it recognizes the value of science without devaluing those who it is chiefly intended to serve! But disregarding such moral standards could potentially lead us into the brave new worlds imagined by both Huxley and Lewis. We must therefore hold these principles in tension and encourage scientific research within the limits of biblical morality alone.

Notes

1. Cited in Lee M. Silver, *Remaking Eden: Cloning and Beyond in a Brave New World* (New York: Avon Books, 1997), 10.
2. Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World* (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1969), 1-4.
3. Silver, *Remaking Eden*, 9.
4. Ibid., 236.
5. Ibid., 236-37.
6. Ibid., 11.
7. Ibid., 68.
8. Ibid., 203.
9. Ibid., 129.
10. *Public Opinion Sought on Embryo Research*, Religious Rights Watch: A Publication of Christian Coalition of America, volume 11, number 1, January 2000.
11. Silver, *Remaking Eden*, 233.
12. Ibid.

13. Ibid., 4.
14. Ibid., 6, 242.
15. Ibid., 6.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid., 233.
18. Genesis 1:27.
19. James 3:9.
20. A biblical understanding of human nature includes both material and immaterial components. We are not told all the particulars about how these components are related to one another, but clearly each can influence the other. In other words, genetic alterations to the human body could also affect the human mind and personality, essential aspects of human nature which, in my opinion, cannot be reduced to purely physical processes. See footnote 23 for further discussion.
21. C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1955), 83.
22. Ibid.
23. The Divine image is neither limited to, nor even primarily concerned with, man's physical being. Rather, this image concerns who, or what, man is *essentially*. And this, I think, is where an *immaterial* aspect of human nature must be introduced. That is, man's peculiar *nature* as a rational, emotional, volitional, moral agent with a special capacity for both forming and enjoying relationships with others (including God) includes both material and immaterial components. Although human nature is now fallen and infected with sin, it still bears the imprint of God's image (Gen. 9:6; Jas. 3:9). Thus, I view any attempt to genetically alter human nature (especially its *immaterial* aspect) as morally objectionable because first, man bears the image of God; and second, although human nature is certainly in need of change, this is hardly an appropriate task for fallen humanity. After all, our real need is not just to be made *different*, but to be made new (2 Cor. 5:17). And this *new creation* is strictly the work of God—not man (Eph. 2:10; 4:24).
24. Alex Dominguez, "AIDS Vaccine to be Tested in Uganda,"

Associated Press, 20 May 2000.

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